

Book Reviews

by Rikky Rooksby

Bloody Treason: The Assassination of John F. Kennedy

by Noel Twyman

(Laurel Publishing, USA, 1997)

xvi + 909pp hardback, \$37.50

There is no doubt that Noel Twyman's book will be seen as an important contribution to assassination literature. It has some faults of presentation but is strong on its own ground, namely, probing *who* could have been responsible for the conspiracy which killed Kennedy. It is not as strong on what actually occurred in Dallas during those fateful days in November 1963. It does not give the kind of overview of witness testimony provided by a book like *Crossfire*, for example. I would not recommend this book to anyone who is relatively new to the subject and needs to become familiar with the basic material and speculations. I would, however, recommend it to experienced readers who know the subject well. Whoever next writes on the assassination will have to take Twyman's book into account.

In his *Prologue*, Twyman explains that he is writing from the viewpoint of 'a prosecutor who is convinced of the guilt of the accused but must present a case to the jury and be challenged by an extremely powerful defence'. Twyman mentions that he rebuts Posner's arguments along the way. The book is divided into five sections: the *Prelude*, looking at 'the obvious "big picture" plus what was widely available to the interested public within ten months after the President was murdered'; *Murder and Cover-Up* on the forensic and medical evidence; *Gangsters, Cops and Spies*; *Right-Wing Extremists and Power Politics*; and *Conspiracy and Cover-Up in Washington*.

There are various black-and-white photographs and diagrams throughout the text and a section of colour plates, including 26 Zapruder frames. One of the most interesting parts of the book

is the discussion of the Zapruder film, which Twyman feels has been altered. He discusses frames 302 and 303 in the light of the first being blurred and the second not, and William Greer's two impossibly fast head turns. There is of course more material than just this in its forging which should have been included. Twyman does not comment on the fact that in frame 335 you can clearly see Mrs. Kennedy's shoulder as though the entire top of the President's head is missing (something upon which Robert Groden failed to comment in his photo book). Harry Livingstone talks about this in *Killing Kennedy*. Twyman should have cross-referenced Livingstone's work in this area. It is important that assassination writers create a sense of a body of work, of how evidence and theories presented by various people build up to make a case. One lone book can always be dismissed as crackpot but a whole group making a common point is less easy to dismiss. As far as the medical evidence is concerned Twyman broadly agrees with David Lifton's theory that the body was altered. Twyman makes an interesting observation on the Mary Moorman photograph and what it shows about John Connally's position in the car.

Beyond page 250 Twyman moves away from the specific events in Dallas and more into the organisation of the conspiracy. The phrase 'involved with' starts to crop up more regularly and tantalisingly through the remainder of the book. I could not begin to list the number of people said by Twyman to be 'involved with' the conspiracy. The Corsican assassin Lucien Sarti (who figured in the British TV documentary *The Men Who Killed Kennedy*) is cited once more as the Grassy Knoll marksmen

who fired the fatal shot. Twyman is forceful in his suggestions that Hoover and Johnson were heavily implicated in the plot. There is a whole chapter on Interpen and Gerald Patrick Hemmings for those who are interested. Hemmings is only a name to me, aside from the piece in a recent issue of *The Assassination Chronicles*.

The book would certainly have been better with some rigorous editing. The same amount of information could have been conveyed in a shorter space. This problem is partly created by Twyman's well-intended inclusion of point-summaries at the end of each section and chapter. However, other irrelevant material does intrude, sometimes of an autobiographical nature. There are a number of books in JFK assassination literature in which the authors tell the story of how they stumbled upon such-and-such a witness or piece of evidence. This style is incompatible with the legal approach which Twyman invokes at the beginning. For example, in *Appendix A* he prints an interview with Madeleine Brown. He gives us the date, time place (and floor) of the meeting, tells us that the restaurant had a spectacular view of Dallas and that Brown arrived late 'because her taxicab had run out of gas! Do we really need to know that? An early chapter gets sidetracked into a discussion of the psychologist Maslow. The chapter on Hemming is also full of autobiographical references. Given the sensational nature of the subject (the JFK assassination), the drier and more objective the presentation the better. I think most of the literary allusions could go as well. They add a factitious note of drama to something which is dramatic enough as it is.

To his credit, Twyman does not idealise Kennedy, something which many JFK books are prone to do. At one point he describes the Kennedy brothers as 'young, ruthless, cavalier and naive in believing that they could accomplish anything they set out to do' (p 12). All too often, writers on the assassination give the impression that America was a wonderful place until Kennedy died and then everything

went to rack and ruin. In fact, one of the things which Twyman's book powerfully demonstrates is that American society and politics were *already* corrupted by the various conspiratorial factions which made the assassination happen.

The assassination brings not the end of a golden era - but rather, shows that *that golden era never existed*.

Noel Twyman's book is rewarding and frustrating by turns. In the end, it doesn't 'solve' the crime, as the blurb promises - but then seasoned assassination readers will take that with enough salt to pack a TSBD book carton! I just wish that the material had been more rigorously compressed.

There's a much better 600-page book struggling to get out of this one.

The Kennedy Tapes: Inside The White House During The Cuban Missile Crisis

by Ernest R. May and Philip D. Zelikov

(Belknap/Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass. and London, 1997)

xvi + 728 pp, \$35.00

Unbeknown to the people with whom he consulted during the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962, President Kennedy taped the various meetings held during those tense weeks. These tapes were created by hidden microphones in unused light fittings in the Cabinet Room and one in the President's desk in the Oval Office feeding a reel-to-reel tape machine in the basement. The editors of this book speculate that when Kennedy was killed there were only three people who knew about the recordings - Evelyn Lincoln and the two members of the Secret Service who had installed and maintained the system. An effort was made to transcribe the tapes for Robert Kennedy by an Air Force aide called Dalton but this was never completed. The tapes remained secret until July

1973 when a Nixon aide revealed to the Senate Committee investigating the Watergate affair that the White House had a taping system. As a result, the Kennedy tapes were turned over to the John F. Kennedy Library in 1975. They comprise 248 hours of meetings and 12 hours of telephone calls.

The editors write of their transcription process: 'the laboriousness ... would be hard to exaggerate'. The tapes are noisy and the voices often indistinct. Several teams worked to produce this text, which remains peppered with the annotation '(unclear)'. The end result is a monumental work and a significant contribution to the historical literature on the Cuban Missile Crisis. Primarily this is a

reference book for historians who want to check who said what, when and who else was in the room. Despite what the dust-jacket says about the book reading better than a John le Carre thriller, it is hard going to read from beginning to end - but fascinating to dip into. Since he did a lot of listening to people around the table, Kennedy's own contributions are fairly brief so there is not that much sense of his character emerging from the proceedings, or certainly not directly.

The complete text of communications between Kennedy and Khrushchev are included. Even if you do not read the transcripts through, the editors' commentary is worth reading.

Assassination Science: Experts speak out on the Death of JFK

edited by James H. Fetzer, PhD

(Catfeet Press, Chicago, 1998)

xvi + 463 pp, \$15.50

I had seen this on a recent JFK-Lancer booklist but little dreamed that I would find it sitting on the shelves at Blackwell's, Oxford! The briefest flick through the pages was enough to indicate that this is essential reading for anyone interested in the assassination and that it may have a crucial influence on the final demolition of the lone gunman/official

version of what happened in Dealey Plaza on 22nd November 1963.

Assassination Science is a collection of essays, letters and documents covering a wide range of topics relating to the case and some of the media controversies surrounding it in the early 1990s. The title is significant. By using the word 'science' the editor is asserting for the

benefit of sceptics that the evidence contained herein cannot be dismissed with an impatient wave of the hand and the ritual intoning of the word 'buff'.

This purports to be *science* and in our culture science is still seen as the best guarantor of the truth (or falsity) of a claim. Whether this is true or not is

beside the point. As a rhetorical strategy, this is a provocative and timely move. The style of the book lives up to its title. This is a more academic, more dryly written book than many in assassination literature. James Fetzer is a Professor at the University of Minnesota, Duluth. The arguments

are closely argued and dense with precise detail. The whole feel of the collection is unlike that of most assassination books you will have read. I think this is one of its strongest features. Sceptics are going to have a hard time with this. The dry quality may not make it the easiest read, but the material is sensational enough, so presenting such material as coolly as possible is a good way of handling things and I think more likely to persuade the uncommitted than the bullish, often over-heated writing of others.

Part I presents essays by Fetzer, Dr. Charles Crenshaw, Brad Kizzia and Dr. David Mantik which deal with the JAMA controversy, the general issue of how the American media has handled the case in recent years, character assassination of witnesses and critics of the official version, and the faked X-rays.

Part II reports on the press conference of 18th November 1993 through the comments of some of its participants, including Dr. Robert B. Livingstone and Fetzer's correspondence with the

New York Times about Gerald Posner's *Case Closed*.

Part III is entitled *Pursuit of Justice in a Democracy* and details letters from Fetzer to US Attorney General Janet Reno and replies from Mary C. Spearing (US Department of Justice), Robert McNamara (former Secretary of Defense), President Bill Clinton and the Assassination Records Review Board. With the passing of time, some of this material will probably seem less relevant since it deals with the secondary issue of various conflicts between different parties. I do, however, sympathise with the frustration of those involved.

The most important section is *Part IV: The Zapruder Film: Seeing But Not Believing*. This features five essays on the Zapruder Film by Jack White, Dr. Mike Pincher and Roy Schaeffer, Ron Hepler, Chuck Marler and Dr. David Mantik. I know of no better discussion of the film than this chunk of 140 pages which constitutes a superb critique of the film's authenticity - or lack of it. If you have read Livingstone's *Killing Kennedy*, this will further persuade you of the unreliability of the film. To Livingstone and Weatherly's remarks, the writers here amass further indications of tampering with the film. However, because of the style of presentation, this material is likely to have more effect in persuading people of the truth of these claims. The

sceptic may find it easy to dismiss the critique of the Zapruder film in a book like *Killing Kennedy* because of that book's style of presentation. Not so with this.

This might just be the lasting contribution of *Assassination Science* - that it finally makes the notion of the Zapruder film as being unreliable (and tantamount in itself to evidence of conspiracy) accepted in wider circles. Oliver Stone's film *JFK* was the apotheosis of the use of the Zapruder film as key evidence proving conspiracy because it appeared to show Kennedy shot from the front (the 'headsnap'). It is ironic that we may now be approaching a time when it will be widely accepted that the Zapruder film is key evidence precisely because it *does not* show us what really happened when in fact it *ought* to.

The collection is rounded off by a theoretical essay called *Assassination Science and the Language of Proof* by Fetzer, an essay by Dr. Ronald White and an Appendix of 14 document and pictures including a CIA advertisement for photographers! In true academic style the book even has an index and notes on contributors. There are diagrams and black-and-white illustrations throughout.

This is a 'must have'. *Assassination Science* - don't leave home without it!

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JFK, RFK, MLK assassinations and related subjects.**

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